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LE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS D'AMERIQUE

ITS BEGINNINGS
ITS DEVELOPMENT

By

MADAME YORSKA

English Version By

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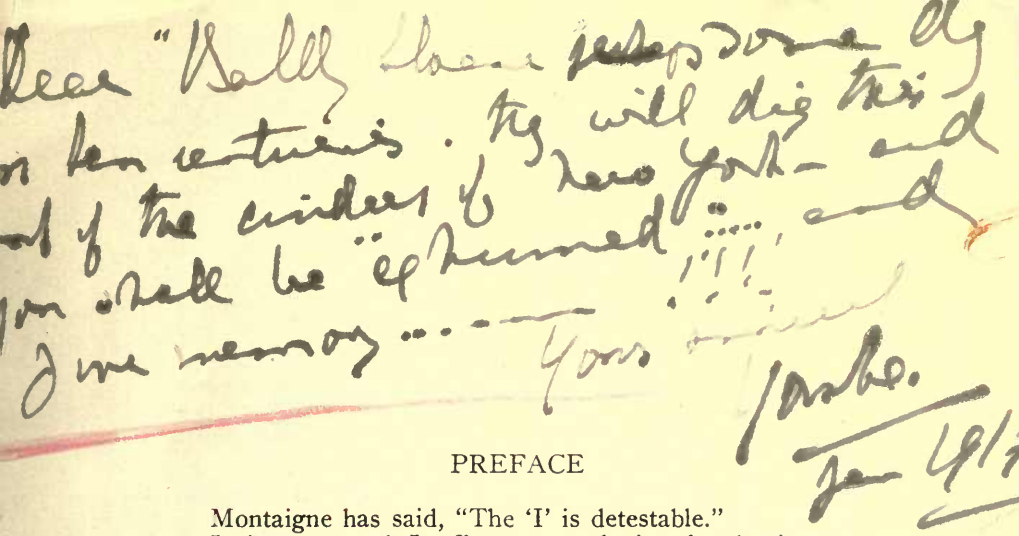

PREFACE

Montaigne has said, "The 'I' is detestable."

It is true, and I offer my apologies for having to speak so often of myself throughout the course of these pages, which consist of extracts from my book, "Lights and Shadows of the Stage" now in the course of preparation. Yet, strange though it may appear, it must be stated that the Théâtre Français of to-day had for a modest starting point my heart filled as it is with the language and the literature of the country which I love above all others.

"Helas," I can not even say "my country" for, as a matter of fact, I am not French.

But I confess that my heart, my brain and the blood which beats in my arteries are French, French, French!

A few days after my arrival in New York in December 1912, I began to rehearse with the admirable de Max a piece in blank verse by the American poetess C—— L——, well known in Parisian literary circles. De Max, like myself, had come to try his fortune upon the English speaking stage.

We had been especially engaged by Mrs. P—— L——, for this performance.

It was an unforgettable event, thanks to the intelligence and the good taste displayed by our hostess in the arranging of this fête.

All the American women whom I met that evening expressed their admiration for the beautiful language of "l'Isle de France," for its writers, its theatres, its artists.

They dwelt so upon the regret which they felt at being deprived of French performances, that I could not refrain from asking why no one had thought of founding a French theatre in New York, especially since the Germans had maintained one for a long time.

It was explained to me that several enterprises of this character had failed, and that such a project could only be the work of a person who would be content with a small return.

Toward midnight, as I was taking leave of Mrs. L—— and of her guests, my friend, Janet Scudder, to whom the French wounded of to-day owe so much, she having been one of the first to start the "La Fayette Kit Fund," said to me: "Yorska, may I bring the painter B—— and his wife to your apartment this evening? They came over from Philadelphia, and have been greatly disappointed at not hearing you play in French. Won't you say some verses for them?"

I agreed and until two o'clock in the morning recited poems of Victor Hugo, Edmond Harancourt, Baudelaire, Jane Catulle Mendes, la comtesse de Noailles and others.

Mme. B—— assured me that in Philadelphia there were a great many Americans who would be delighted to subscribe to French performances. And so when Miss Scudder and her friends had left, I could not keep from dreaming of this project.

The following morning, upon awaking, I saw clearly written on the hospitable threshold of my future these words: "I will found a French theatre in New York."

The idea of submitting this presumptuous ambition (I had no money, but this has never yet prevented me from doing as I wished) to the examination of the common sense of kind friends never suggested itself.

Nevertheless, my plan of a "Théâtre Français" was so well established in my mind that I drew up a list of the actresses whom I would like to have come to New York, for generally the only theatrical women brought over from France are those whose semblance of talent permits them to exhibit behind the footlights their luxury and their jewels.

I discussed with C—— L—— the possibility of raising capital to bring over some artists. She objected, and with justice, that it would be preferable to profit by the presence of de Max and me to arrange a series of French literary matinees, during the course of which we could announce the performances for the coming season and secure subscriptions.

At this juncture, Miss Marie Dressler engaged me to play two acts of "Camile" with her "vaudeville road show." Since the engagement gave me the means of facing the printing bills, the expenses for publicity and for the rent of a hall in which to present the French matinees, I accepted, and told Miss L—— that upon my return to New York, I would devote all my time to the idea.

It was after one of the rehearsals with Miss Dressler, who insisted almost every evening upon my staying to dinner, that I met the composer Baldwin Sloane. He was writing the accompaniment for Miss Dressler's songs, as well as the libretto for the opening of her spectacle.

When we were presented, Sloane, exclaimed: "Ah Madame Yorska, que je suis enchanté de vous connaitre! J'ai tant entendu parler de vous!"

I looked at him in surprise for up to that time I had not encountered anyone in the theatrical world of New York who spoke French with such ease.

Upon my interrogating him, Sloane satisfied my curiosity at once, explaining that his mother was of Parisian descent, and that from childhood he had devoted his leisure to the study of French.

I confided to him that Miss L—— and I intended to inaugurate a series of French lectures and performances upon the conclusion of my engagement with Miss Dressler, these performances to be given in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

"That's not the way to go about it," declared Sloane. "In America things must be done on a 'big scale' to succeed. New York should have had a French theatre long ago. Why shouldn't you and I try to found one.

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Two weeks later, in the train carrying us to New York, Sloane and I discussed in detail the practical means of organizing the performances we had in view.

"It will be easy to find money for the development of such an interesting proposition," affirmed Sloane.

"Do not count upon me to aid you in that respect," I replied. "I confess my absolute incapacity to unearth disinterested capitalists."

In spite of this confession, Sloane did me the honour of not withdrawing his friendship. He said: "We could divide the work this way: I will undertake to

form the syndicate, and I will be the first to figure in it, for I am going to risk all my savings in the enterprise. I can not give a better proof of my faith in its success. As for you, will you arrange to organize a committee of patronesses among your connections in New York?"

I exclaimed: "With pleasure. Before writing to these ladies I will prepare a circular together with a list of modern and classic pieces requiring but a small company."

"An excellent idea," said Sloane. "When we have enough capital to rent a theatre we will go to Paris to engage the artists and come to an understanding with the Société des Auteurs regarding plays."

Having met at Mrs. B—— A—— H——'s, Mr. Mason, the President of the Alliance Française, I asked Sloane what he thought of offering to Mr. Mason the presidency of the committee of patronage. He approved and requested me to write Mr. Mason upon my arrival in New York.

This time I stopped at The Astor, in order to be nearer the Weber and Field's Theatre, where we were playing. Every night I stayed at my window, watching the incessant coming and going of street cars, autos, the crowds, the luminous advertisements, veritable rivals of the stars, which passed and repassed upon the great napkin of the sky. The thought that soon, perhaps, in the midst of all this metropolitan activity, of this exuberant flowering of entertainment to which international elements of every sort contribute, the French dramatic art would have its own temple, and that the beautiful and ardent works of the land of Racine and of Henry Bataille would some day cause the great cosmopolitan soul of New York to vibrate, filled me with a delicious fever.

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In less than two weeks, I had received favorable replies from all those to whom I had presented my request, and

I was already able to write in my list of patronesses the following names:

Mrs. Philip Lydig
Mrs. Arthur Huntington
Miss Janet Scudder
Mrs. B. B. Guinness
Mrs. Norman de R. Whitehouse
Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin
Mrs. Edwin Dodge.

I reproduce herewith Mr. Mason's letter:

"640 Madison Avenue,
April 14, '13.

"Dear Madame Yorska:

"Your kind note reached me upon my return from Atlantic City where I spent a week resting.

"I shall be glad to hear all about your plans for a French Theatre but regret that I cannot meet you this week. I am going out of town again, to be gone for several days, but upon my return shall give myself the pleasure of calling to see you.

"With kindest regards,
"Sincerely yours,
"(Signed) "ALEX. MASON."

Later, when I showed Mr. Mason the proposed circular, asking him to be the President of the Committee of Patronage, he replied that his personal affairs did not leave him time to devote to a new organization, and that he did not wish to figure at the head of so important an enterprise, when he would not be able to participate in an active fashion. (How few men give evidence of such charming scruples!)

Sloane, at the very beginning, encountered more or less indifference in the circles where he had hoped to enlist capital.

Nevertheless he advanced the expenses of an office,

situated at 500 Fifth Avenue, and with the list of patronesses whom I had already obtained, made a general announcement in the papers.

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A few days later, I received a missive, bearing the letter-head of the Alliance Française, and signed Lucien Bonheur, president of the Cercle Dramatique of that organization. In this letter, Mr. Bonheur asked permission to present a request concerning the performances which the Alliance Française intended to give within a few weeks.

The day after, when he called, Bonheur asked me to play the role of Cyprienne in "Divorcons" for a week. He explained to me that his confrères and he had decided to give a larger scope to the Cercle Dramatique, taking advantage, whenever possible, of the presence in New York of Parisian artists.

I replied that in view of my association with Sloane, I could not give him a definite answer without consulting the former.

He then asked for information regarding our projects; I furnished him with it and showed him the letter from Mr. Mason, as well as those of the ladies whose patronage I had requested.

Bonheur assured me that up to this time all French theatrical enterprises had failed pitifully, and that he regretted seeing Sloane and me expose ourselves to so cruel a deception.

At our first interview the matter rested there.

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The next day, I found Sloane particularly happy for he had just received a call from a man whose high financial and social position could not fail to bring in his train an entire group of capitalists. He announced his inten-

tion of having a long article published in the papers the following Sunday.

Bonheur asked me, over the telephone, for another interview.

This time Bonheur told me that as the hopes of Sloane seemed about to be realized, he would be disposed to abandon his schemes of increasing the number of performances of the Cercle Dramatique and unite with us.

"As a stock-holder?" I asked, quite proud that I, too, should have discovered an investor.

"No," replied Bonheur. "But tell Sloane that I could bring the subscribers of the Cercle Dramatique, and induce him to let me take part in the direction of the 'Théâtre Français.'"

When I repeated these words to Sloane, he objected that he considered this interview useless, especially as he had been assured of the collaboration of Professor Vlober to take care of the foreign correspondence, and that, since I had accepted the responsibility of the artistic direction, he did not see why we should join in with a third party.

I saw Bonheur again and told him frankly the reasons why Sloane, greatly impressed by the calls and meetings of hypothetical investors, did not see the necessity of an interview with him at that moment.

Bonheur replied: "If Sloane does not succeed in assembling the necessary funds, and he desists, as I believe he will find himself forced to do, see me and I will aid you to realize your project. As for the literary matinees, which you intended giving before becoming acquainted with Sloane, would you like to have me organize them? I can obtain one of the concert rooms at the Plaza Hotel upon exceptional terms."

"I will ask Sloane what he thinks of it," I answered.

"Certainly," responded the latter, when I presented the question. "Appear as much as possible. Play for the Alliance Française if they ask you. It will be the very best publicity for us, since it was because of having

known you that I decided to devote my savings and my time to organizing a 'Théâtre Français' in New York."

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At this moment, Madame Sarah Bernhardt was playing at the Palace. I went to see her.

I found her in her dressing-room, set up in the middle of the stage, against the scenery and crowded with the rarest of flowers—hommages of friends and strangers grateful for the unforgetable delight furnished the people by her incomparable art.

Although I had not seen her for a year, my heart beat as heavily as the first day, when, armed with a letter from Mme. Edmond Rostand, I went to her at the Theatre Sarah Bernhardt.

The gracious Seylor, the devoted companion of the Très Divine, came to meet me. She lifted the portiers and I saw Sarah Bernhardt, garbed in the long robe of "Phedre," her beautiful eyes still moist. I fell to my knees and kissed her hands with all the adoration which I feel for this supreme artist, this superhuman woman!

"My little Yorska," she said kissing me on both cheeks, "I am very proud of you. You are quite right in wishing to spread a love of the French theatre among the admirable American public. Come and have lunch with me to-morrow: you can give me all the details of your plans."

That same evening, Bonheur telephoned and requested an introduction to Madame Bernhardt. I answered: "I am having lunch with her to-morrow, and then I shall go to the Palace. Meet me at four o'clock at the stage door."

The next day, as I entered the salon of the Hotel Marie Antoinette, the walls of which had disappeared behind huge bunches of roses and pinks, I found Mlle. Seylor in conversation with a young American who spoke admirable French. It was thus that I made the acquaintance of Beverly Sitgreaves.

A rustling of silk, a breath of oriental perfume mingled with the odor of fresh pinks (Her favorite flower) and She entered, followed by Prince Igor, Her barking pomeranian.

Sarah Bernhardt took me to one side and said: "Yorska it would give me great pleasure if you were to ask Beverly Sitgreaves to play with you; she speaks our language beautifully and she not only has a splendid artistic temperament but she knows the technique of the stage as well as the best European artists."

I then asked permission of Madame Bernhardt to introduce Bonheur, explaining the position which he occupied in the Alliance Française, and telling her that he was to act as impresario for a series of lectures, given in conjunction with dramatic scenes, which I intended to arrange before the opening of the Théâtre Français.

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Bonheur came to the boat to tell me the result of his enquiries regarding the price of a concert hall at the Plaza.

During the course of our conversation it had been agreed that Bonheur and I were to share the expenses and the profits of this enterprise. That morning he told me that a thousand circulars and the stamps to post them would cost about fifty dollars. He asked me to leave him the sum of twenty-five dollars so that he might have the cards printed upon receiving a cable from me announcing the exact date of my return. I agreed to this and I drew a cheque for twenty-five dollars on the Equitable Trust Company, making it payable to the order of my friend Theadora Bean of "The Morning Telegraph" whom I requested to give the sum to Bonheur.

During the few weeks spent in Paris, I received no news from Sloane.

However, I soon received a letter from Bonheur assuring me that Sloane had renounced his idea of a "Théâtre

Français," and requesting authority to print the circulars announcing our series of literary matinees.

I wrote him to await my return.

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Sloane, upon my arrival in New York, acknowledged that the difficulties which he had met, had discouraged him. I begged him to arrange for the occasional performances, and tried to convince him that this system would enable us to gain the confidence of the public without the necessity of large capital.

Like a true American, Sloane rejected so modest a policy and impressed upon me the fact that not being able to realize his ambitious dreams he preferred to abandon the whole thing.

Whereupon, I declared: "Well, for my part, I am going ahead on the basis of which I have spoken." He replied: "I wish you success with all my heart."

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Bonheur came to see me the same day. I gave him an account of my conversation with Sloane and told him that since the Théâtre Français was not going to be built, instead of contenting myself with literary matinees, I intended to arrange for performances of entire plays, for during my stay in Paris I had prepared a list of modern and classic works requiring but a small cast.

"Are you still disposed to go in with me?" I asked of Bonheur.

"Certainly," he replied, "on the condition that I do not risk a cent in the affair."

"Yet you were willing enough to share the expenses of the literary matinees," I objected.

"Then it was only the question of renting a hall at the Hotel Plaza. It will not be the same with a theatre. Actors will want guarantees. You certainly realize," he added, "that if Sloane has not succeeded in finding stockholders it is because the financiers to whom he submitted

his aims had no faith in the commercial possibilities of a French theatrical enterprise. I will not risk my money before knowing whether such an attempt has chances of material success."

"Sloane wanted capital enough to build a theatre, to bring well known artists from Paris etc., etc. He foresaw enormous expenses," I said. "My own project is less ambitious, since it is only a question of securing a theatre for special matinees, guaranteeing the stipend merely of two or three actors, and renting an office. All that represents at the most a capital of two thousand dollars."

"I will not advance a cent," replied Bonheur.

"But what was your idea then in repeating to me before my departure for Paris that in case Sloane did not succeed in finding funds, you would like to become associated with me in launching in New York a French theatrical organization? I contribute the social patronage, a studied plan of action, my experience acquired with masters like Sarah Bernhardt and André Antoine; I appear in the capacity of artistic director, of stage manager, of leading woman. Then, too, the whole scheme of the thing is originally my own. What *do you* offer me in exchange?"

"The partnership which I suggest," replied Bonheur, "is of an entirely different character. My situation as vice-president of the Alliance Française is of incomparable value to you. The very fact that I shall be officially connected with it gives an appearance of solidity to your undertaking. Besides that, the subscribers to the Cercle Dramatique de l'Alliance Française will not consider it any infidelity to me to attend your performances, and my name at the head of your circulars insures you this clientele. And so the collaboration which I propose represents almost a financial guarantee. In return for this advantage I will take fifty percent of all the profits. As I told you before I will share with you the expenses of

the circulars and the stamps. You certainly must know whether your social and artistic position will bring enough subscribers to sustain the expenses of your performances."

"I have entire confidence in my project," I said, "but the first expenses will have to be met and if you demand fifty percent what will remain to offer those who are willing to advance the initial costs? Can you not interest some of your business acquaintances?"

"None," replied Bonheur. "They all refuse to believe in the success of your projects. And for that matter, if you reject my proposition, I will arrange various classic and modern programs by the Cercle Dramatique of the Alliance Français, and you will have to compete against a rival organization which can not interfere with your plans as long as it only offers three or four performances a year."

"You will at least rent an office?" I asked. "I can not give my hotel as the address of a theatrical organization. That would have entirely too amateurish and transient an air."

"I will make no advance whatsoever," repeated Bonheur, inflexible, "except my part of the expenses of circulars and stamps. If the first thousand does not bring at least a hundred subscriptions within a month we have only to reimburse our first subscribers and renounce our projects."

"After all," I reflected, "Bonheur is vice-president of the Alliance Française. His name will be influential in the French colony of New York. I only lose a month in trying to found a theatrical organization on this basis, and it would be something so unique if I were to succeed without a cent of capital that it is worth tempting fate."

Bonheur awaited patiently the result of my reflexions. Finally I said:

"It is understood. I accept the partnership you outline, and will write my patronesses that." . . . "As a

matter of fact what shall we call our organization?"

"Did not Sloane incorporate the name 'Théatre Français'?" demanded Bonheur.

"I do remember Sloane having told me that he had gone through this formality upon our return to New York with the Dressler company. I have an idea. I will call upon the President of the American Stage Society, Mrs. B—— G——, and ask her to request from her associates the permission to model our organization after theirs. If these ladies authorize us to do this, we can call our enterprise 'The French Drama Society' or 'The French Stage Society.'"

"It is an excellent plan," said Bonheur.

"I will not be able to see you for several days," I replied, "for I will have to find an apartment which the proprietor will let me use as a public office. In the meantime you can see the theatrical managers and ask them to let us have a theatre once a week for a percentage of the receipts."

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After three days searching, I finally found a little apartment—two rooms, kitchen and bath—which could serve as an office for our theatrical venture.

The location was ideal, the Adlon being situated between the residential section and the theatres.

Once settled, I requested Bonheur to come and see me. I told him that Mrs. G—— had obtained the desired permission, as I had promised that our dates would not coincide with those of the "American Stage Society." I explained that the system of this society was to give Sunday evening, behind closed doors, a dress rehearsal to which only members were admitted, and that the next Monday afternoon the piece was repeated at a public matinee.

We decided upon the title "French Drama Society."

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It was I who proposed to Bonheur that he be treas-

urer, because with all the work of correspondence, of organizing and of rehearsing, it would have been impossible for me to go to the bank to deposit the subscription money and the receipts, and then, too, I preferred that it should be he, in his capacity as vice-president of the Alliance Française, who assumed this responsibility.

I said to him: "As soon as we have a few hundred dollars we can open an account at the Equitable Trust Company."

Bonheur objected that this was a useless formality and expense, and that he could put the money in his own bank at Sheepshead Bay, Long Island.

He then added that for a society to have a substantial air it must have a president, and that since "The French Drama Society" consisted only of us two, he would have to assume that title. "As for you, Madame Yorska, you can inscribe yourself 'artistic director.'"

I asked the few French actors then in New York to let me put their names on our circulars in order to show the public that we had within reach factors which would enable us to open upon the date announced. All accepted, in spite of the fact that I could not promise them an engagement, Bonheur persisting in his refusal to make any advance.

I had written also to my friend, Paul Strozzi, in Paris, telling him of my association with Bonheur, and begging him to request the authors whose plays I wished to present the first year not to demand royalty.

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We were still unable to print the circulars not having a theatre as yet. One day Bonheur came to me and said he gave it up; that from then on I would have to go about and see the managers because not being in the profession he had too much trouble securing an interview. Mr. Erlanger, although he was a college chum

of Bonheur, even refused the Aerial Theatre, located on top the New Amsterdam.

The next morning I decided to face those managers whom Bonheur had not yet seen.

I rang for the elevator boy and told him to get me the "Morning Telegraph." This may appear absurd, but in the most difficult situations of life, I always have recourse to childish superstitions which vary according to the object I have in mind. That morning I decided to open the paper with my eyes shut and to apply to the manager upon whose name I should place my finger. I did so. I had fallen upon a long article devoted to the excursion into the theatrical world of a young attorney, Joseph P. Bickerton, who had just leased the Harris Theatre. In the interview Bickerton declared that his object was to open a field of activity for young authors and actors who were not yet established.

"Perhaps he will be interested in a young founder," thought I.

So I telephoned my friend, Theadora Bean, whose position in American journalism puts her in touch with those of social and artistic prominence.

An hour later I left her hotel armed with a letter of recommendation for Mr. Bickerton.

Upon arriving at his office, I gave Miss Bean's letter and my card to the secretary and Mr. Bickerton received me at once. I told him my projects, I showed him my list of patronesses and finished with these words:

"Since we have no backer, and must depend entirely upon subscriptions, The French Drama Society can not guarantee you the rent of the Harris Theatre. I therefore request you to allow us the use of the theatre Sunday evening and Monday afternoon, and to rest content with a percentage of the subscriptions and the receipts."

Bickerton replied:

"You may have the theatre for nothing for the entire length of your first series. Naturally the expenses of

lighting and of ushers etc. will be yours. I consider it altogether admirable that a young woman should have the courage to undertake such an enterprise without any financial support and I myself will be most happy to see you succeed, having a great admiration for the French stage."

I murmured incoherent words, searching for some means whereby I could publicly show or express my gratitude. Suddenly I had an inspiration and cried: "I name you vice-president of 'The French Drama Society.'"

Bickerton smiled and accepted with charming good grace, quite astonished that one voice should suffice to elect a vice-president.

The hours seemed to me interminable, so anxious was I to announce the good news to Mr. Bonheur. Having unburdened myself of my joyous secret I finished by saying: "I do not know of such generosity in all the history of the theatre, and so I have offered Bickerton the vice-presidency of 'The French Drama Society.'"

We then took up the final details of the circulars in order that Bonheur might give the copy to the printer.

At this moment, one of my friends, Mrs. G—— N—— came to call and was present at the remainder of the interview.

"Who is going to address the circulars and receive the people in quest of information?" she demanded.

"I shall have to do it myself," I replied, "since I have not the means to employ a secretary. I shall divide my day between office work and rehearsals, devoting the morning to the first and the afternoon to the second."

"Your health will not stand it," said Mrs. N——, "let me give you my mornings. It is almost the duty of your American friends to aid you, for if you succeed, you will have done a great deal for the education of our public and of our schools. Let me act as secretary for nothing."

"I accept gladly," I answered. "I have asked myself how I was going to do all the work." Turning to Bonheur, I said: "We are going to put Mrs. N—— down as Secretary of 'The French Drama Society.'"

I publish herewith the reproduction of the first circular which spread to the four corners of New York the news of our plans.

Of our nine patronesses, one was brought by Bonheur, he having asked me to inscribe on my list the name of Mrs. W. Burke Cochran, explaining to me that he had political connections with her husband.

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With what feverish hands, Mrs. N—— and I folded and addressed those first circulars!

I remember even to-day my joy at opening the first envelopes containing checks. Subscription No. 1 fell to Edwin Dodge, the well known architect. Martin Beck and Winthrop Ames were among the first subscribers. I turned the checks over to Bonheur every day so that he might deposit them in the bank.

But "Helas," at the end of two weeks we still lacked money enough to enable us to put artists under contract, and Ruben, the only "jeune premier" to be found in New York at the moment, could not wait any longer. After much supplication I finally obtained from Bonheur an agreement to share with me one-half of the guarantee which Ruben exacted to remain patient a few weeks longer.

Beverly Sitgreaves, whom I had invited to join us as a member of the company, then offered to procure subscriptions by making personal visits to the clubs and homes where her gifts as a diseuse had won her great popularity. I gave her two hundred circulars and a few days later she enriched our treasury with numerous subscriptions. I also wrote a letter to all my patronesses reminding them that 'The French Drama

The French Drama Society

OF NEW YORK

President and Treasurer

Mr. LUCIEN L. BONHEUR

Vice-President

Mr. JOSEPH P. BICKERTON, Jr.

Artistic Direction

Madame YORSKA

Formerly of

The Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, Paris
The Théâtre National de l'Odéon, Paris
The Théâtre Royal, Brussels

Secretary

Madame G. NASH

Office Hours: from 10.30 to 12.30, at "The Adlon," 200 West 54th Street, Southwest Corner

Patronesses

Madame SARAH BERNHARDT

Mrs. PHILIP LYDIG
Mrs. ARCHER HUNTINGTON
Miss JANET SCUDDER
Mrs. W. BOURKE COCKRAN
Mrs. B. B. GUINNESS
Mrs. NORMAN De R. WHITEHOUSE
Miss FLORENCE GUERNSEY
Mrs. LEE HAGGIN
Mrs. EDWIN DODGE

The Society's object is to create a larger interest in the French Drama and the French Language and give the members an opportunity to appreciate French plays of artistic recognition in their original form.

Le but de la Société est de propager la langue française et de donner à ses membres une idée plus étendue, plus générale, du drame français, ainsi que toute facilité d'apprécier, dans leur forme originale, les pièces françaises d'une valeur artistique reconnue.

Society was entirely dependant upon subscribers and requesting them to make an active campaign everywhere in our behalf. Soon the checks began arriving four or five by each delivery. At the end of the month we counted more than a hundred subscribers. This number enabled us to face the necessary expenses, since aside from Ruben and Perrin (the latter having replaced Benedict who could not come) we did not engage a regular company, and only paid very meager salaries to the other artists of whom we had need for minor roles.

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I put in rehearsal "La Vierge Folle," of Henry Bataille, and "Le Passant," by François Coppée, confiding the role of Mona Delza to Georgette Passedoit. Since she had told me frankly that she had never had so important a part, I rehearsed her alone from eight until ten. Later on I gave lessons in diction to Mlle. Nane Defrance, so that she could fill roles in the classic matinees. In exchange these two young women played with "The French Drama Society" for an absurdly small sum.

At ten o'clock in the morning I hung on the door of my apartment a card bearing the words, " 'French Drama Society,' Office Hours 10 A. M. to 1 P. M." And all morning Mrs. N—— and I received those who came to see for themselves that the "French Drama Society" was not a myth.

At one o'clock I removed the card, the table laden with papers, was put into the kitchen, and the rehearsals began.

Some of our artists, being professors, had their days taken up. During the afternoon I worked on the important scenes with Beverly Sitgreaves, Ruben and Perrin, our only professionals, and the general rehearsals did not commence until eight o'clock in the evening. At the end of two weeks, my neighbors having complained of the noise which continued until two

or three in the morning, I decided to corrupt the night watchman at the Harris Theatre who, for a tip, allowed us to rehearse on the stage from 11 o'clock at night until five in the morning.

Not for all the gold in the world would I sell my memories of the first month's existence of "The French Drama Society." I can not think of the adorable devotion of my dear comrades without a sentiment of gratitude for the charming destiny which brought me in contact with such valiant workers. Many were the dawns which found us united around a table at Childs, where, upon leaving rehearsals, we went to get a cup of hot coffee before returning home, worn out with fatigue.

As Mr. Bonheur's private business left him but little leisure, all he could do, aside from sharing with me the expense of fifty dollars for stamps and circulars, was to call twice a day for the checks, and stand by the box office at the public matinees watching the receipts of which he never found time to show me a statement.

I can hardly say either that his name was any aid, since upon the day of the first performance, we counted about one hundred and sixty members of whom only five or six were French.

I do not dream for an instant of holding this against him, however, knowing that he spread a vigorous campaign in our behalf among his business connections.

Nor am I disposed to believe that the officials of the Alliance Francaise were hostile to us at that time, as Bonheur subsequently affirmed, since they loaned us one of the best artists of the "Cercle Dramatique," René Wildenstein, for the first performance of "La Vierge Folle."

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In these pages, I can not repeat too often that the principal factors which permitted the Théâtre Français to take root were:

1st. *The generosity of Bickerton,* thanks to which the entire receipts could be devoted to artists' salaries, expenses of costumes for the classic matinees, electricians, mechanics and printing.

2nd. The no less astonishing magnanimity of the American dailies, to which I had sent a circular accompanied by a personal letter explaining to them that, in view of the total absence of capital, the "French Drama Society" could not insert paid advertisements, and begging them, despite this, to mention our projects. Not only did the papers, without exception, give us constant attention in their theatrical and society columns, but almost all of them devoted entire page interviews. *I know of no other country in the world* where the press would have shown itself so superbly disinterested. "Le Courier Des États-Unis," the only French organ published in New York, also advertised us energetically.

3rd. Charles Frohman, the celebrated American manager, "Helas" one of the victims of the Lusitania, who loaned us scenery (through the intermediation of William Seymour), thus reducing our expenses to the hiring of "props."

4th. The devotion of my dear artists, who with the exception of Ruben, Perrin, and Beverly Sitgreaves, gave lessons from morning 'till night and who at all times gave evidence of a good faith which met every test.

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The success of the "French Drama Society was so rapid that the day of the presentation of "La Rafale" we announced two special matinees during the Christmas holidays. ("La Rafale," I should explain was the second play of the series.)

One afternoon, while I was conducting a rehearsal, Bonheur rang, entered in a whirlwind, and asked me to let him take the books. He told me that he wished

to make a recapitulation of receipts and expenditures, and that he could only devote himself to this work at night. Accordingly he would have to have all the documents in order to keep the accounts regularly. *He promised to submit them to me every week and furthermore to give me a duplicate.*

Strange though it may appear I have never seen them since that moment!!!!

Towards Christmas, my daughter, who was on a vacation, fell ill, and I insisted that we should take from the treasury the rental of an office. But Bonheur replied that it would be better to be prudent with the expenditures and that he would transfer the offices of "The French Drama Society" to his house.

The state of my daughter's health prevented my holding even the rehearsals at home, and as Bonheur assured me that the treasury was almost empty (although I repeat I was never shown a bank statement), and that we could not hire a hall for rehearsals, we found hospitality for some time at the Café de Paris, whose manager gave my artists and me a thousand marks of kindly attention.

Nevertheless he could not refuse patrons, and the maitre d'hotel chased us from one private dining room to another as guests arrived.

Unhappily, the Café de Paris passed into the hands of creditors. The sheriff's men were good enough to let us rehearse until the moment came for putting the seals on the door. At four o'clock one afternoon we found ourselves, in the midst of a driving snow storm, on 42nd and Broadway. Henri Verneil, one of our comrades, offered to let us continue the rehearsal in the room which he occupied in a house on 41st Street.

Bonheur, to whom I telephoned from Verneil's, came to see us. I told him that we must hire a decent hall. He promised to hunt a location, and telephoned me the following day that he had found a room on 48th Street, for a dollar and a half.

Upon arriving I found my friends awaiting me in the basement of a family boarding house situated near 8th Avenue. From the kitchen came unsupportable odors and noises.

"Why did you not go up at once to the room which is intended for us?" I said.

"But this is it," they replied.

From that day on I recommenced rehearsals at my apartment.

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By the end of January I had mounted and played eight pieces *without seeing a single box office statement, neither had I seen the growing list of members.* With my telephone bill, my electric light bill, the expenses which I had assumed for the gowns of Mlle. Passedroit and the tips to the night watchman at the theatre, I was some two hundred dollars out of pocket. I told Bonheur that I did not wish to go on with the joint venture, and added that I wished to see the books and accounts.

Bonheur promised to show them to me by the end of the week.

Since I had refused to give my consent to the announcement of a new series, Bonheur ended by telling me that two of our subscribers had given him to understand that they would be disposed to protect us to the extent of two thousand dollars against any deficit, in case we wished to persist in our enterprise during another period of five weeks. Bonheur then explained to me that the Baron O. and Mr. K., through a feeling of delicacy had not wished to make me this proposition directly but that they thought a minimum guarantee, aside from my share of the profits, should be assured me in the next series,and that this guarantee would be included in the general expenses.

The same day, Bonheur brought the Baron O. to rehearsal. The latter told me in substance that he found

the efforts of the "French Drama Society," worthy of interest, and would be happy to have a business talk with me concerning the matter.

I replied that I preferred to have him discuss this with Mr. Bonheur.

Upon the night before the last performance of our first series, Bonheur told me that the Baron O. and Mr. K. had definitely agreed to facilitate the means of giving a second series. I at once drew up a program of pieces for him to read to the public and to print on the new circulars. I remarked to Bonheur that we could no longer accept the hospitality of Bickerton, because he had only offered the theatre to me for our first series, which was in itself an exceptionally generous act, and that henceforth we must insist upon his accepting a share of the receipts and subscriptions.

The following day we were informed by Bickerton's secretary that upon no consideration would he allow "The French Drama Society" to remain in the theatre.

Upon the conclusion of the matinee, I went to Bickerton's office, and was received at once. I took the initiative and explained that I had not come to request him to allow us the use of the theatre for nothing during the second series, but to propose a business arrangement.

Bickerton addressed me in the following language:

"Madame Yorska, I have a boundless admiration for your unconquerable energy, and your devotion to a beautiful artistic cause. I shall never regret having been able to facilitate the realization of your projects. But I shall need the theatre for the rehearsals of my plays. Do not take offense, either, if I ask you not to mention my name further on your circulars."

During the six weeks that we were the guests of Bickerton at the Harris Theatre we had played: "La Vierge Folle," "La Rafale," "Les Trois Masques," "Britanicus," "Andromaque," "La Gioconda," "Les Femmes Savantes," "Le Passant," and "Le Baiser."

In the meantime, the I—— ambassador at Washington, the Marquis C—— C—— asked me to produce his French adaptation from "The Husband in Love With His Wife," of Giocosa. Arrangements were made to do so somewhat later.

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Our tribulations commenced the day we left the Harris Theatre, although we ended by obtaining the Garrick Theatre upon very favorable terms. But this theatre had been closed for several weeks and was not heated. For the greater part of the time we rehearsed in the basement, so as not to be overcome with cold and damp. At these nocturnal rehearsals, in an icy theatre, several of my comrades fell sick. One of them, André Grevin, contracted a fatal cold and died in the hospital a few days after the performance of "Le Ruisseau."

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I owe it to myself to make reference to the general devotion which put the Théâtre Français of to-day upon its feet. Let those who read these notes compare the criticisms of 1913-1914 with those of the following years and they will see that my comrades gave, under conditions which no company has ever 'faced, except possibly André Antoine's in Paris, performances worthy of praise.

From the way in which my dear friends put their very souls into the work, you would have thought that they saw floating before them, during these exhausting nights, a bit of the flag of France!

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New York Herald, January 20, 1914.

After a private dress rehearsal on Sunday night, the "French Drama Society" produced publicly yesterday afternoon, in the Harris Theatre, Racine's classic play,

"Britannicus," and Theodore de Banville's "Le Baiser."

"Britannicus" put the French actors of the company upon their mettle, but they met the demands made upon their art with fine response and won the applause of a large audience. Mme. Yorska, in the title role, was excellent, giving a fine representation of the son of Emperor Claudius, while Mr. Jose Ruben, as Neorn, gave a vivid impersonation of the famous son of Agrippine. As Junie, beloved of Britannicus, Mme. Georgette Passedoit, was emotionally effective. Mme. Mary Norton acted the role of Agrippine.

In the lighter play, "Le Baiser," Mme. Yorska gave further proof of her versatility by acting the part of a fairy. The one remaining role, that of Pierrot, was played by Mr. Jose Ruben. The entire afternoon appeared to be enjoyed by the audience, which seemed to revel in the fine delivery of French.

New York Sun, February, 22, 1914.

French Drama has found its way to New York at last, and it hopes it has come to stay.

During the last ten or twelve years many attempts have been made to implant a French theatrical organization in the American metropolis. They all began obscurely, lived their short lives known only to a very limited circle of French residents and dropped away into complete oblivion. Honestly, they hardly deserved a better fate. Those little makeshift companies of players were too far from being representative of the art of the stage in France. They were doomed to leave American theatre goers who are used to better things, thoroughly uninterested.

Not so with this most recent organization, the "French Drama Society." It is a serious thing and it is being taken as such by those whose patronage has appeared most desirable to the society; such among the French colony as, in Paris, would have their regular

seats, anywhere from the boxes to the third tier, at the Comédie Francaise or at the first-class Boulevarde theatres; those among New Yorkers who have learned to love the beautiful language of France and who delight in hearing it well spoken; those among the university and high school students who make a specialty of modern languages and to whom it is stimulating to see the masterpieces of French dramatic literature, both classic and modern, presented to them as artistically as they might hope to see them if they went abroad.

To these three classes of New York's population, more especially the "French Drama Society" has sent out an appeal, and the response has surpassed its wildest hopes.

Le Courrier des Etats-Unis, 23 Decembre, 1913.

Comme toutes les sociétés en général, "la French Drama Society" a un but: c'est de propager la langue française et de donner à ses membres une idée plus étendue, plus générale, du drame français, ainsi que toute facilité d'apprécier, dans leur forme originale, les pièces françaises, d'une valeur artistique reconnue.

Voilà un but fort louable et vers lequel les efforts de tous les Français devraient tendre; mais il est une autre raison pour laquelle la colonie française doit voir la venue de la nouvelle société d'un oeil favorable, l'accueillir chaleureusement et lui prêter le concours de son appui moral et celui, non moins précieux, de sa bourse.

Cette raison réside dans la création en elle-même d'un théatre français à New-York, ce qui permettra à ces mèmes Français d'entendre ici les pièces de leurs auteurs dramatiques, les tragédies de leurs poétes, jouées par des artistes de leur pays et de leur civilisation.

Le Courrier des Stats-Unis, 17 Mars, 1914.

C'est hier que le "Voleur" a été joué pour la première fois en français en Amérique.

L'oeuvre de Bernstein a été fort longtemps jouée en anglais, et l'on se souviendra que Mme. Simone, l'artiste française bien connue, la joua en cette langue pendant une saison, soit à New-York, soit dans les autres villes des Etats-Unis.

A Mme. Yorska incombait la tache d'interpréter le role feminin principal, celui de Marie-Louise. Comme dans la "Rafale," jouée au début de la saison, l'excellente artiste fut admirable de passion. Ses magnifiques qualités et son don accompli de la scène se sont largement déployés, surtout dans le deuxiéme acte, qu'elle a joué avec cette fougue nerveuse et ces accents passionnés qui révèlent l'atrice de talent. Mme. Yorska appartient à la bonne école française moderne.

M. Ruben jouait naturellement le role de Richard Voysin. Excellente interprétation, il a été magnifique de violence dans le deuxième acte, qui a été le meilleur de la soirée.

Joué par des artistes tels que Mme. Yorska et M. Ruben, ce deuxième acte vaut la peine d'être vu. Plus d'une fois, ces deux acteurs ont atteint au plus haut degré de l'art dramatique, et plus d'une fois ils nous ont tenus sous le souffle de l'émotion.

Parmi ceux qui interprétaient les roles secondaires nous citerons M. Andre Loir, qui dessina fort bien le personnage de Zambault. Nous sommes heureux de constater ici les progrès de cet artiste, qui, il n'y a que trés peu de temps encore ne jouait qu'avec des amateurs.

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Toward the middle of February, as I was passing before the Comedy Theatre, I met Maurice Revness, the secretary of William Elliot, who told me that he had telephoned me frequently, but in vain, and that he had a very interesting proposal to make to me regarding Philadelphia, where a group of French and American people of social importance had been formed with

the object of guaranteeing French performances at the Little Theatre; and that he wished to put me in touch with Mr. S——, upon whom had fallen the responsibility of arranging these performances. I told Revness that I would send Bonheur to see him. He replied that he desired to treat with me personally. Here follows a letter which he sent me several days later.

F. Ray Comstock's,
Princess Theatre of Thrills.
February, 27, 1914.

Manager's Office.
My Dear Madame Yorska:

The Philadelphia gentlemen interested in presenting "The French Drama Society" for two performances have completed their arrangements, and will pay $— for each performance, the first performance to take place March 12th or 19th (this will be definitely decided by Monday next), and they have for their first bill selected the following one act plays from the list of plays in your repertoire:

Le Passant, by Coppée,
Le Baiser, by de Bainville,
Le Dépit Amoureux, by Moliere.

They have not as yet decided upon what play they wish for the second evening, which will be either March 19th or April 2nd. I, however, would suggest that you get in communication with Mr. M. J. S——, 403 Penn Sq. Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa., which gentleman is in charge of the arrangements. If I can be of any further service it is for you to command me.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,
MAURICE S. REVNESS.

And thus it was again through me that this opportunity came.

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It was at the time of the performance of the Marquis de C——'s play in Washington that Bonheur and I had our first serious disagreement, one result of which was that the Marquis refused to come to New York to witness the performance of his play and wrote me a letter giving *me* the French and English rights to his work for America.

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Upon our return from Washington, we met with a grave disappointment. The Garrick Theatre had been rented for motion pictures. As a result we could not have the house for our performance of "Le Mari Amoureux De Sa Femme" (which we had already decided to add to our repertoire and for which the receipts promised to be splendid).

"What shall we do?" Bonheur kept repeating. "What shall we do?" I echoed. Suddenly I had a brilliant idea. "Go to the Italian Club," I said, "and ask these gentlemen to put up a stage in the center of the ball room. That will make the papers talk and will give a certain piquancy to our performance." Bonheur begged me to go with him. Happily, we found Mr. P——, who at once offered to plead our cause.

I had not been mistaken, the publicity resulting from this impromptu performance at the Italian Club drew us an enormous crowd. The ball room was packed.

As I had not seen the accounts for two months, I again asked Bonheur to show them to me. He replied that he could not let me have them at the time, for he wished to show them to two subscribers of the "French Drama Society," one of whom was a stockholder in the Century Theatre.

A few days later our company installed itself in the charming little theatre, which was ceded us for a weekly rental as small as that demanded by the other houses for a single performance.

At once our receipts increased, as we were able to give eight performances a week, thus allowing the French colony, whose members are almost all busy during the day, to frequent the theatre.

During the week of rehearsals at the Century Lyceum, an American impresario engaged me for a tour of Canada. Bonheur promised to have all statements and accounts ready upon my return.

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About this time a few members, whose intention it was to advance funds to the "French Drama Society," held two meetings, to which Bonheur and I were separately invited. The one which I attended was held at the home of Mrs. B. W. During the course of the meeting, I was presented to one of our subscribers who exclaimed: "Ah, Madame Yorska, I can not tell you how much I have admired you this winter. When Bonheur asked me if I would consent to advance money, I replied, 'upon the condition that Madame Yorska be re-engaged.' "

"Re-engaged," I laughed. "That is about as if after having dined at my home you allowed me to spend the night there. I am on an equal footing with Bonheur in everything that concerns 'The French Drama Society.' *He has no capital invested* any more than I have." And I recounted to those present our association, adding that I had no time to personally supervise accounts; and that if they persisted in their generous intentions I would prefer that their committee guarantee me a fixed sum and 25% of the profits. As regards anything else, I asked that they come to an agreement with our treasurer.

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Bonheur announced to me his intention of leaving for Paris as soon as the new committee had definitely assured us an advance of funds. I drew up a list of

pieces and artists whom I already knew, and gave him a letter of introduction to Paul Strozzi in which I requested the latter to second Bonheur in his dealings with the "Societé Des Auteurs."

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I returned to New York toward the end of May, and was preparing to leave for Paris when I received a cable from Bonheur announcing his immediate return and asking me to await him.

Upon telephoning to his home to learn the exact day of his arrival, I was informed that he was very ill, and that it might be necessary for him to leave immediately for the country. Wishing to depart at the earliest possible moment, I went to the dock to request an immediate interview. Madame Bonheur said that her husband had been dangerously ill, that he had been unable to complete any of the arrangements started in Paris, and that he was counting on me to finish them. She begged me to content myself with taking notes, to have no argument with Bonheur, for he had a cerebral attack and unless he could rest the worst was to be feared. I promised to do as she desired, and went with her to meet her husband. I found him indeed much altered. He expressed himself with great difficulty. Later on in the afternoon I went to see him, and he gave me the list of artists whom he had met and the pieces which he had been able to obtain from the "Societé des Auteurs." I remarked to Bonheur that we ought to change the name from the "French Drama Society" to "Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt." He replied that he preferred the "Théâtre Français" to which Sloane had given circulation, and asked me if I thought the latter would refuse to cede us this name which he had incorporated.

"I am sure that he will give us authority to use it. I saw him upon the night of the closing of the 'French

Drama Society,' and he was sincerely happy at our success."

Bonheur then demanded that I sign a contract. "What contract?" I exclaimed.

"The same that all the artists will sign," he replied.

"But I am not only an artist, I am founder of the 'French Drama Society.'"

"This contract has nothing to do with that fact. Now that we are about to have a regular committee of stock-holders, we must present them accounts in the usual manner."

Still not understanding, I replied: "All right, I will write a letter to the committee and will stipulate again the conditions of my guarantee."

"That is impossible, Madame Yorska, for our stockholders will not wish to appear officially, so as to protect themselves from claims."

Bonheur appeared extremely fatigued and begged me not retard the development of our enterprise by putting difficulties in the way. Recalling the entreaty of his wife, I promised to reflect, but I told him that before arriving at any decision I must have a copy of the contract and would examine it with a clear head, sending it back to him signed from Paris.

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Much to my astonishment I found Bonheur awaiting me at the pier. He told me that I absolutely must sign the contract before leaving New York, explaining that as founder I was in no way obliged to return to New York, and that he must be in a position to give our members definite assurance of my presence. I unfolded the contract and saw that Bonheur had not made another, but had merely written in some of the clauses which I had dictated. I then objected that instead of being drawn in the name of "The French Drama Society" the contract was made with him. He replied that being the treasurer

of the organization this was perfectly natural, and that since we intended to change the name of the society it would be best to have only the name of the treasurer figure on the contracts.

I have never been able to argue in front of the ocean! I signed the contract.

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Upon my arrival in Paris, an American friend who was acquainted with all the facts regarding the founding of the "French Drama Society," sent me an interview, given by Bonheur, upon the eve of his departure and published in the New York Herald of Paris. I transcribe the article in its entirety.

"MR. BONHEUR SEEKS PARISIAN ARTISTS FOR NEW YORK. PRESIDENT OF 'FRENCH DRAMA SOCIETY' PREPARES FORTHCOMING SEASON IN AMERICA.

"M. Lucien Bonheur, president of the 'French Drama Society' of New York, has just arrived in Paris to book French actors and actresses for his coming season of French plays at the Century Lyceum, Sixty-third Street and Eighth Avenue.

"In the course of a conversation he had yesterday with a Herald correspondent, M. Lucien Bonheur explained that the object of the 'French Drama Society' was to create a larger interest in the French Drama and the French language on the other side of the Atlantic, while it would give its members a good opportunity to appreciate French plays of recognized artistic value in their original form.

PROGRAMME IS EXTENSIVE

"The success of the last year's French season in New York," continued M. Bonheur, "has induced *me*

to widen the scope of the undertakings. Whereas the 1913 season lasted only five weeks, during which, among other plays 'La Rafale' and 'La Vierge Folle' obtained a tremendous reception, this year's season will last ten consecutive weeks, beginning on November 15th, at the Century Lyceum, New York. Then, when this is over, that is to say on February 1st, 1915, *I* intend to visit a number of the provincial cities including Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans and Baltimore with my company.

"I have retained the services of Madame Yorska, one of Madame Sarah Bernhardt's favorite pupils, who will, as she did last year, act as stage director of the 'French Drama Society.' M. Jose Ruben, will also remain with the company, and Mr. Claude Benedict has just been engaged by me in Paris.

"These artists together with some others that I have still to engage, will *form my stock company, and I expect* to give a new play each week during the ten weeks of the season.

MADAME BERNHARDT IS MUCH INTERESTED

"Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, who is the honorary president of the 'French Drama Society,' is very much interested in my schemes and has promised to give as much help as she can. Mr. Myron F. Herrick, the American Ambassador, whom I saw yesterday, is also very enthusiastic.

"This year *I want* to produce a number of the latest Parisian successes and also several plays which will appear simultaneously in the French capital. These latter are the subject of negotiations upon which *I have* just entered with the *'Societé des Auteurs'* in Paris and *I hope* to present new works by M. M. Brieux, Bernstein,

Bataille, Kistemaeckers, de Flers and Caillavet before my American public.

"The 'French Drama Society's company is to be under the *personal direction of an advisory board,* composed of many well known Americans. Some of the members of the board will soon come to Paris in order to see the artists before they are engaged. Like the Metropolitan Opera House, the French Theatre will be mostly supported by subscribers, who number some three hundred and fifty up to the present."

According to that interview, Bonheur considered himself *sole founder, sole director, sole promotor, of the* "French Drama Society"!!!!

Finally, one of my patronesses received a new circular on which he styled himself sole founder.

This time Bonheur presumed a little too much on my weakness.

I wrote him and expressed my opinion very plainly, forbidding him to ever mention himself on our circulars as founder unless he named me in like manner. I warned him, furthermore, that I intended to have an article published in the Parisian papers setting forth the true facts regarding the origin of the "French Drama Society."

In the meanwhile, I undertook the negotiations with Poiret to whom I gave a list of one hundred and thirty-five gowns; and went on with the enquiries and demands upon the "Societé des Auteurs" for rights to their pieces. I came to definite arrangements with the artists engaged for the next season.

The expenses incurred during my stay in Paris were never reimbursed me from the treasury of the "French Drama Society."

In response to my letter, I received a long missive from Bonheur. He told me that he was astonished that a woman of my intelligence should place any dependency upon assertions published by a reporter, and that while I was covering him with reproaches he had been working

LUCIEN L. BONHEUR
Président

Mme YORSKA
Direction Artistique

OUVERTURE

DU

THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS

Sous les auspices de la

French Drama Society

LE 16 NOVEMBRE
--- 1914 ---

CENTURY LYCEUM
63d St., Central Park West

Abonnements pour la saison de dix semaines :
A partir de $25.00 pour deux.

Derniers succès parisiens rendus par une troupe d'artistes parisiens.

Costumes de Paul Poiret.
Chapeaux de Camille Roger.

Prix des places : par personne, à partir de 50 cents.

DIX VENDREDIS LITTÉRAIRES

pour jeunes gens et jeunes filles
précédés d'une conférence par des auteurs français :

LA SOURIS, de PAILLERON ;
LES ROMANESQUES, de ROSTAND ;
L'ABBÉ CONSTANTIN, etc., etc.

Abonnements pour les 10 matinées
A partir de $10.00.

Prix des places, par personne, à partir de 50 cents.

Pour abonnements, renseignements, etc., s'adresser à

LUCIEN L. BONHEUR, Président,
114 EAST 56th STREET — NEW YORK

on a deal which ought to bring me a great deal of money. It consisted in lending my name to toilette preparations in exchange for which I was to receive 25% of the profits while he would take half as his commission.

He then explained that his printer had changed the letter head without his authorization, and that I must never forget that his admiration led him upon all occasions to take up my interests.

Could I reply to such a letter by reiterated reproaches. Nevertheless, upon the advice of friends I determined to prepare a detailed report of the founding of the "French Drama Society."

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August 1st, 1914. Never to be forgotten date.

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The banks in Belgium had closed the night before my departure. But, fortunately, upon my arrival in London, I met Mrs. S—— M——, whose husband was helping Americans stranded in Europe at that disastrous moment.

Mrs. M—— upon seeing me, cried out: "Yorska, I will put you on board ship to-morrow. We need you in New York. In founding and organizing the 'French Drama Society,' you have forever assured yourself of our country's protection." Mrs. M—— insisted upon my accepting a superb cabin on the Royal George which left the following day for Montreal. She paid everything and came herself to see my daughter and me off on the train which was to carry us to Bristol.

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Since the Théâtre Français was not to open until Nov. 16th, I decided to play a brief vaudeville engagement.

Bonheur, now completely recovered, asked me to go with him to the perfumer who was to exploit the Yorska toilette preparations. He brought me the circular which

I reproduce, and pointed out that under his name appeared merely the mention "President," as we had decided in November, 1913. We then went to the establishment of Nathan Hirsch, 133 W. 21st Street, where I was to choose the perfumes, the flasks, and the boxes for the sale of toilette articles. I agreed to send a letter authorizing the use of my name, and another to Bonheur, himself, according him 50% as commission.

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Beginning with the second stage of my tour, I received letters and telegrams from Mme. Bonheur, who was in great distress. Bonheur had had another attack, and was for the moment incapable even of dictating his letters. Not being able to free myself from my engagement with my American manager, I carried on the business correspondence from the various cities where I chanced to find myself on my tour.

When Bonheur was better, and while I was in Chicago, he wrote me asking me to organize a committee of patronesses there, through the aid of my friend, Mrs. E—— C. L——.

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On November 16th "The Théâtre Français" officially opened its doors with "Une Femme Passa," by Romain Coolus. One disagreement with Bonheur followed another. He avoided explanations, giving his feeble health as an excuse, and when I finally told him I disapproved of his policy, he replied that he had heard enough of my remarks; that his doctor had told him he would fall seriously ill if he were subjected to the slightest excitement, and that he had too much money invested in "The Théâtre Français" not to justify him in running it according to his own ideas.

"Since when have you any money in the Théâtre Francais?" I demanded. "We are only in the middle of

the second week. The funds advanced by our subscribers certainly can not have been exhausted already."

"But they have never advanced a cent," replied Bonheur. "As you were on the road, I did not wish to worry you and I took my own money to pay the fares of the artists. Mr. K—— has loaned the treasury a thousand dollars. That is the only sum which has been loaned 'The French Drama Society.' I assure you that I have determined to make money, and I do not intend to let you put any spokes in my wheel with your ridiculous ideas."

Had our subscribers really gone back on their word?

Then what is the significance of the following letter which he wrote to Poiret at the end of June, and of which he himself sent me a copy in order that I might know upon what terms to negotiate with the famous couturier?

"Monsieur Paul Poiret.

"My Dear Sir.—Your letter, dated June 8th, arrived here on June 21st, which is about twelve days after you had received mine. Let me first reply to your questions.

"1. All the persons, members of the Committee, and more than three hundred others, are interested, either as subscribers *or as having advanced funds.*

"2. The artists who are going to wear your costumes should have come to see you. They are all actresses of experience and know how to wear gowns. Mme. Yorska is a very well known and great artist, and will give you all the information necessary.

"3. I can not conclude this letter without telling you how much yours astonished me. When I left you everything had been so well understood that I had announced it to the papers. Le Gil Blas of May 22nd and all the New York papers spoke of it. I had announced it here in my letters to subscribers. I have just engaged someone to tend the Perfume Shop, and I have arranged the lobby for the young girl who is to be in charge. I am awaiting the letter from your agent regarding the com-

mission and I hope that you will send me the costume for the young girl.

"I hope that you will send me a letter of confirmation and that everything will now go along to our mutual satisfaction.

"Your entirely devoted,"

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Determining to ascertain the facts, I contented myself by saying:

"As long as the Théâtre Français's only 'raison dê'etre' from now on is to make you rich, I shall cease to appear in it. Everyone knows that I originated the entire scheme and founded 'The French Drama Society' with your collaboration. Were I to remain, people would think that I had a share in a policy of which I disapprove most strongly."

I then wrote to Bourke Cochran, who, Bonheur had assured me, had volunteered his services to "The French Drama Society" should need for arbitration arise at any time, sending him papers and letters proving that Bonheur and I had founded "The French Drama Society," and asking him to obtain for me the books and lists which Bonheur had taken from my apartment in January, 1914, and also statements of the bank concerning our treasury. obtain for me the books and lists which Bonheur had taken from my apartment in January, 1914, and also statements of the bank, concerning our treasury.

The next day, Mr. Bourke Cochran's secretary in person returned me these papers with a letter in which Mr. Cochran told me that to his great regret he found himself too intimately associated with Bonheur in political affairs to take charge of my case.

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A few weeks later, my friend, J. S., telephoned me one morning and spoke exactly as follows: "Yorska, I am

always glad to pay my two dollars to see you act, but I refuse to be pursued all evening by an usher who squirts me with 'parfum Yorska' and sticks red cardboard boxes under my nose urging me to buy Yorska preparations."

My friend added that it could hardly help my career in this country to have the reputation of selling products in the theatres.

Suffocating with indignation, I bounded into a taxi, and upon arriving at the Century lobby the first thing I saw was a show case filled with boxes and bottles bearing my name, and which were not even of the color and design chosen. I went to the box-office, knowing that Bonheur came there every morning, and upon his arrival asked him how he had dared put these products on sale in the very auditorium of the Théâtre Français without my authorization? I reminded him that these objects were supposed to be submitted for my approval before being put on public sale, and that furthermore there had never been any question of selling them except in the department stores.

Bonheur replied that he would let me know how many bottles had been disposed of.

"I do not want to know. I do not want to profit from any affair undertaken with you, and furthermore, if this case is not out of here before eight o'clock, I will have it seized in the midst of the performance." I added that since his Mr. Hirsch had failed to keep the terms of our agreement, I insisted upon the return of my contract. It was six months before I obtained this, and then only through the intermediation of Coudert Frères.

A few days before leaving again for a tour of the English speaking stage, on the night that Mlle. Dorziat played for the first time on our boards, I asked a comrade of the previous year, to offer her a bouquet and read the letter in which, as co-founder of the Théâtre Français, I welcomed with joy the appearance of a Parisian star. The audience applauded and the next day the *Times* cited

this incident in its account of the evening. But the following day, the young actress came to me in tears and told me how Bonheur had insulted her, and had finally discharged her, declaring that the name of Madame Yorska must never be uttered within the Théâtre Français!

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To sum up the facts of my association with Lucien Bonheur: In October, 1913, he and I entered into an agreement whereby we became co-founders and partners in the "French Drama Society." My partner and I agreed to share equally the profits of the enterprise. He was to assume charge of the business management, while I acted as artistic director. Upon the opening of the second season, this agreement was modified and according to the terms of the new arrangement, I was to receive 25% of the profits in addition to a fixed guarantee which was made me, this guarantee being counted in the general expenses of the season.

At no time did I see a box-office nor a bank statement, and from the moment Bonheur took the books from my apartment, in January 1914, I have never laid eyes on them.

I would have instituted legal proceeding long ago were it not for lack of means to retain the services of an attorney.

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September 1st, 1916.

According to the newspapers, Messieurs Clarence Mackay, Robert Goelet, Otto Kahn and William K. Vanderbilt have now constituted themselves stockholders of the Théâtre Français.

Let us hope that those who have given evidence of this generous and splendid spirit will remember that there is to-day in Paris a theatrical manager named André Antoine, to whom the modern French stage owes three-

fourths of its glory, and who, because of the tragic situation in which France at present finds herself, is unable to exercise his genius.

Having furnished the obscure labor which put the "French Drama Society" upon its feet, without the slightest financial support, save the generosity of Joseph P. Bickerton, who gave me his theatre, I take the liberty of requesting that the new stockholders invite to New York to preside over the destiny of the Théâtre Français the only man capable of illustrating by his masterly "mise en scene," his superior knowledge of the values of the French race and literature, the glory of the French Dramatic art!

YORSKA.

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